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C O N F I D E N T I A L ROME 003849

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [MOPS](#) [MARR](#) [PREL](#) [IT](#) [AFGHANISTAN](#) [IRAQI](#) [FREEDOM](#)

SUBJECT: ITALIAN PRT/FSB ON BACK BURNER FOR NEAR FUTURE

REF: A) ROME 2913 B) ROME 2122

Classified By: ACTING POLITICAL MINISTER-COUNSELOR JONATHAN COHEN  
FOR REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D)

1. (C) Summary. Facing budget cuts and with a military straining to meet its current obligations overseas, Italy will not consider deploying a PRT/FSB in the near term. However, Italy has not ruled out leading a PRT/FSB at some point in the future. Italy will keep the possibility on the back burner while its NRF battalion remains deployed in Afghanistan, and during its ISAF command from July through December 2005. To make a PRT and/or FSB feasible for Italy in the future, the U.S. will have to take the initiative to convince other Allies to contribute. End Summary.

2. (C) On September 27 POLMIL Counselor engaged MFA NATO Office Director Giovanni Brauzzi on Italy's position with respect to a prospective phase II PRT/FSB deployment. Brauzzi did not rule out Italy's reconsideration of a PRT/FSB deployment, but indicated that the GOI did not intend to be proactive on the matter and was not inclined to consider such a deployment before 2006, when Italy will have finished its semester of ISAF command (July-December 2005).

3. (C) Lack of resources, according to Brauzzi, is the main factor impeding PRT/FSB deployment. He repeated the frequently cited point that, in a year of unexpected military budget cuts, Italy is already pushing its limits in foreign military operations. Because of its deployment of the NRF land battalion in support of Afghan elections through December 2004, its assumption of ISAF command in July 2005, and its commitments in Iraq, Italy will find itself strapped for resources at least through the end of 2005. (Note: Italy will also take on EUFOR and KFOR leadership in late 2005/early 2006.)

4. (C) Addressing possible Italian command of a future FSB in Herat, Brauzzi noted that the Italian Air Force had recently expressed greater confidence in its ability to provide air support requirements. Brauzzi said an Italian-commanded FSB was still conceivable, though, again, not in the short term. In any case, Brauzzi emphasized that an Italian-commanded FSB would require strong commitment of resources from Allies as well as, he hoped, substantial participation by Afghan forces.

5. (C) Discussing current demands on Italian military resources, Brauzzi pointed out that Iraq has become Italy's number one priority. Afghanistan is obviously highly important as well, but Italian politicians' claims that Afghanistan takes precedence serve mainly to assure the public that Italy's military commitments abroad are in line with NATO and the UN. Brauzzi said that the GOI now has too heavy a political and military investment in Iraq to see its reconstruction fail.

6. (C) Comment. The Italian PRT/FSB is off the front burner but not off the table. For now, the MoD still must decide how to implement a cut that amounts to some four percent of total defense spending; and the Italian military is close to maxing out its current deployment capabilities. Still, Italy has a political interest in being a visible part of the solution in Afghanistan. In 2003-2004 Italy completed detailed planning for PRTs in Ghazni and Herat, in both cases withdrawing a standing offer only in response to last-minute U.S. requests. Once Italy's NRF land battalion is back on home soil and Italy's ISAF command expires, Italian officials may be willing to consider further military commitments in Afghanistan. However, even in 2006, Italy would be unlikely to have either the resources to stand up a PRT/FSB on its own or the clout to cajole sufficient partner participation. To convince Italy to take on a PRT and/or FSB, the U.S. will have to put serious political muscle into finding willing partners. End Comment.

7. (U) Minimize Considered.

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